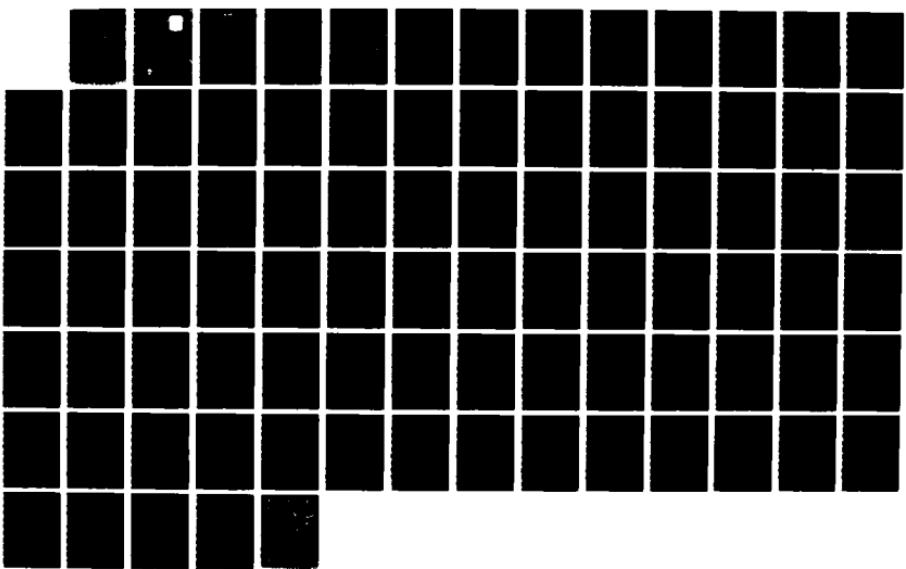


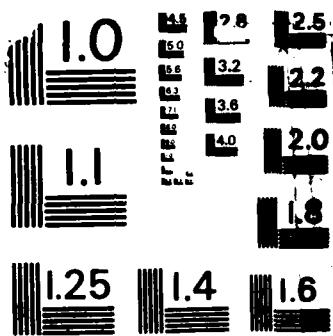
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AN EXAMINATION OF THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT  
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

BY

COLONEL WILLIAM J. CREWS, AUSTRALIAN ARMY

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bility for supporting regional defense activity, and participate with France and South Pacific Forum in resolving differences between the two parties on France's involvement in the Region. But for Australia, a major reassessment of its approach to French activity is recommended, recognizing the legitimacy of French interests and seeking a compromise solution which will enhance Western hegemony. It remains a fundamental Western interest to counter Soviet penetration into the Region through effective diplomatic, economic, and defense support measures which recognize the sovereignty and aspirations of the South Pacific people.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT  
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel William J. Crews, Australian Army

Colonel Neil S. Hock, MI  
Project Adviser

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23 March 1987

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR : William Crews, Colonel, Australian Army

TITLE : An Examination of the Potential for Conflict in the South Pacific Region

FORMAT : Individual Study Project

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►The South Pacific Region has been strategically benign. However, recent developments, including fishing agreements between island states and the Soviet Union, and the thrust for independence in New Caledonia, raise the possibility that this Region may see conflict in the future. Such conflict may be between island states, within island states, or involve extra-territorial powers.

This study assumes that if the likely causes of conflict can be identified, then it may be possible to adopt appropriate strategies and policies to limit such conflict. The study examines contemporary issues in the Region and concludes that limited conventional conflict is possible, ranging from harassment of governments by extra-territorial interests, through civil war to superpower confrontation. The most likely of these is civil war in New Caledonia. To avoid such conflict, it is recommended that the US restrain its military build-up in the Region, allowing Australia and New Zealand to carry principal responsibility for supporting regional defence activity, and participate with France and the South Pacific Forum in resolving differences between the two parties on France's involvement in the Region. But for Australia, a major reassessment of its approach to French activity is recommended, recognizing the legitimacy of French interests and seeking a compromise solution which will enhance Western hegemony. It remains a fundamental Western interest to counter Soviet penetration into the Region through effective diplomatic, economic, and defence support measures which recognize the sovereignty and aspirations of the South Pacific people. ←

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## PART 1 INTRODUCTION

The South Pacific Region is that area generally south of the Equator bounded by Australia and Papua New Guinea in the west, and French Polynesia in the east.

We might regard this Region as strategically benign. Although it did not escape the ravages of World War II, it has never seen conflict of the magnitude of Europe or its nearer neighbours in South East Asia. Until recently, it has attracted little superpower attention.

Decolonization has proceeded steadily. The remaining problem area in this respect is France which retains its possessions in French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna Islands.

While the island states are Western oriented, and their evolving political systems are democratic in nature, they do not wish to be seen as too closely aligned with the US. They relate more readily to both New Zealand and Australia. To some extent, they have regarded ANZUS as a contribution to their security. But it has been only the minor partners with whom they have maintained close political, economic, and defence links. In the

case of New Zealand, there remain very strong cultural ties.

The South Pacific has been benign for several reasons, including:

- geographic remoteness from the centres of military power, conflict, and confrontation;
- lack of substantial, exploitable resources worth contesting; and
- the widely-held perception that the Pacific has been a US 'lake', and that that country clearly had strategic dominance in the Region.

Recent developments threaten to disturb this relative tranquility. These centre around two issues:

- Soviet consolidation of its bases in the Far East, and particularly in Vietnam, has allowed it to extend its reach southward. While ostensibly it seeks friendship and economic cooperation, its longer term goals can be assumed to include direct challenge to US interests.
- The related issues of French resistance to New Caledonian independence movements and their continuing program of nuclear testing in the South Pacific. Not only is the French position contrary to the wishes of South Pacific Forum members, but in the case of

New Caledonia, there is increasing concern that undue influence is being exerted by external sources, including Libya, intent on fomenting unrest or pursuing goals inimical to those of the island states.

It would be useful here to briefly summarize why we should pay closer attention to the South Pacific. Does it have any strategic significance?

#### THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Politically, the island states have a creditable track record for maintaining post-independence stability. But these states do not constitute a dominant bloc within the United Nations. Lacking substantial economic or military leverage, they are unlikely to become more than minor players in international politics for some time to come.

The importance of the South Pacific perhaps lies not so much in what the island states can do - for they will be dependent on outside assistance for some time: their significance is in where they are and what they mean to the Pacific Rim countries. This is particularly so in the context of regional security and when considering in whose 'sphere of influence' the island states should lie. As Coral Bell suggests, 'The Pacific is

a meeting place of American, Soviet, Chinese and Japanese spheres of action and interest.<sup>1</sup>

For Australia and New Zealand, the South Pacific is the 'immediate neighbourhood'. Using Nuechterlein's intensity of interest matrix,<sup>2</sup> the Region can be considered of vital interest to both countries in nearly all respects. In his recent Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities, Paul Dibb was even more specific:

In the South Pacific we are perceived as being by far the largest power. Our fundamental national security interest is to maintain the benign strategic environment that currently prevails, free from unwelcome external pressures.<sup>3</sup>

Nuechterlein suggests that the South West Pacific (in which he includes Australia and New Zealand) represents a vital interest to the United States in terms of favourable world order and the promotion of values, a major interest in terms of defence of the homeland, and a peripheral interest in terms of economic well being.<sup>4</sup> These might be open to challenge but there is an increasing awareness in the United States of the strategic value of the South Pacific in terms of the enhanced Soviet power projection capabilities from mainland Asia.<sup>5</sup>

In his analysis of US security interests in the Pacific islands, Dorrance<sup>6</sup> comments that their strategic importance -in terms of lines of communication - relates not only to access from the US to Australia and New Zealand, but as an alternative route to the Indian Ocean should there be interdiction in the

Strait of Malacca or elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago.

And he goes on to suggest that:

Ironically, the Soviet Navy would face a similar problem. US and allied or friendly regional military forces are capable of preventing the transit of Soviet ships from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean... Consequently, the Soviets might also turn to the South Pacific and Tasman Sea as an alternative route...<sup>7</sup>

The conclusion is reached that US security interests are therefore 'best served by the absence of adversary bases from which hostile forces can operate against allied ships and aircraft.'<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the best indication of US concern with the future need for unimpeded access into and through the South Pacific is the refusal by the US Government to sign the protocols to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. This Treaty will be examined further in Part 4 of this paper.

Soviet interests in the region are rather more obscure. And it will be suggested in Part 4 that the South Pacific is not yet a high priority for extending Soviet influence. But they are exploiting any opportunities to establish a presence and challenge US regional dominance. This alone clearly suggests that the strategic relevance of the Region to the Soviet Union is also increasing.

### HYPOTHESIS

It remains a goal of US and Australian foreign policy that the South Pacific island states continue to coexist in peace and harmony, and to this end, that they are protected from external influences likely to disrupt their way of life. A range of national policies exists to achieve these objectives, including support for the South Pacific Forum as the recognized regional grouping of island states. But the question is - will they continue to be effective? More importantly, what future policy options will best support Western interests in this region and in so doing, reduce the potential for intra-state or inter-state conflict?

In the pursuit of the national interests of both Australia and the United States, we need strategies which reflect the increasing importance of this Region. Confrontation obviously would be inimical to our national interests. It is therefore suggested that if the likely causes of conflict in the Region can be identified, then we might be able to limit or prevent such conflict through appropriate peacetime strategies. This is the fundamental hypothesis of this study.

## AIM

This study will examine the potential for conflict in the South Pacific Region and will recommend appropriate policy options which may reduce such potential.

## SCOPE

### Defining the Region

This study will be concerned with island states and nations within the South Pacific Ocean area generally bounded by Australia and Papua New Guinea in the west, French Polynesia in the east, the Equator in the north, and Antarctica to the south. The region includes Kiribati and Nauru, but excludes the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands, currently the responsibility of the United States.

### Methodology

History contributes to our understanding of both the present and the future. The conflicts in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, South Africa and even Afghanistan are not simply the result of some contemporary disagreement. Such conflicts have an historical basis and consequently, they do not lend themselves to

rapid or simple solutions.

It would be of some value to briefly review the history of these islands as a first step in identifying likely issues of disagreement. Particular attention will be paid to the process of decolonization.

The study will then review the current status of the major island states, before moving on to address specific issues of concern. After briefly digressing to review what history may tell us about the 'causes of war', the study will attempt to indicate specific possibilities for regional conflict before then examining what policy options may be available in the shorter term to limit such possibilities.

The paper will conclude with some recommendations for consideration.

#### Limitations on the Analysis

National strategy encompasses economic, political, psychological, and military elements. All of these are important and it is critical that policies represent a coordination of strategic elements. But of necessity, this study will concentrate on military aspects and security policies. Further, as we are concerned with maintaining the basically Western orientation of the island states, it will be the policies of the United States, Australia and perhaps New Zealand which should be specifically

addressed. The United States has the military power projection capability and is the only nation able to directly challenge Soviet intentions. It also has the greatest influence over other powers with perceived or real interests in the Region. Australia is the nearest nation having the capacity to materially assist other nations, both in developing self-defence capabilities and in economic growth. And although its capacity to assist materially is more limited, New Zealand does have close cultural and political links with many of the island states.

Influence over the policies of extra-regional powers, specifically France, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan, should therefore be effected primarily by the US but with the support of Australia and New Zealand as appropriate.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Coral Bell, "The Security of Pacific Ministates", Asia Pacific Defense Forum, Supplement Winter 1985-86, p22.
2. Donald E. Nuechterlein, America Overcommitted, pp.10-15.
3. Paul Dibb, Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities, p.4.
4. Nuechterlein, p.143.
5. Caspar Weinberger, US Secretary of Defense, addressed the National Press Club in Canberra on 5 November 1982 in these terms: 'From the United States perspective, each of these agreements (Pacific treaties - including ANZUS) is more important today than on the day we signed it. United States interests in the Pacific, (including the North and Western Pacific), already vital to maintaining our security, are becoming even more important.'

6. Hon John C. Dorrance, "United States Security Interests in the Pacific Islands", Asia Pacific Defense Forum, Supplement Winter 1985-86, pp.2-12.

7. Ibid.,p.7.

8. Ibid.

PART 2  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

DECOLONIZATION

This century, and particularly the past decade, have seen a significant move towards independence within the South Pacific states.

Colonial interests in the Region reflected the earlier conquests and expanded empires of European powers.<sup>1</sup> But German influence largely ended after World War I when the Trust Territory of New Guinea (the northern segment of what is now Papua New Guinea) came under an Australian mandate, subsequently confirmed by the League of Nations. By this time Britain had already divested itself of its former colonies of Australia and New Zealand which remain independent parliamentary democracies within the British Commonwealth.

Even Australia had status as a 'colonial power' until Papua New Guinea gained its independence in 1975 after a two-year period of self-government.

Elsewhere, all former British possessions or protectorates now have independence except for the Cook Islands, Western Samoa, and Niue. These states have maintained, largely by choice, some continuing form of association with New Zealand, allowing in most cases for New Zealand to provide for their defence and to control matters of foreign policy.

France has had possessions in the South Pacific for more than 125 years and continues to be a colonial power in the Region. While it relinquished its interests in the former Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides, now Vanuatu, it retains as overseas territories French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna. In the process, it has sought to achieve some balance of interests between the indigenous Polynesians and Melanesians (who generally constitute the majority races) and its other French citizens. France provides for the defence of its territories, their government and administration, and is the major source of imports and recipient of exports. It also gives substantial cash aid.

One of the more remarkable features of the transition to independence in this Region has been the general stability, and the lack of bloodshed which has characterized such changes elsewhere in the world - most notably in Africa and South Asia. That most nations have chosen to maintain close ties with their

former colonial powers - Vanuatu being one notable exception - is a further tribute to the way in which they were prepared to assume the responsibilities of independence.

#### THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II

While the main thrust of the Japanese advance was to the south through the Philippines and westward towards the US through Micronesia, Japanese ambitions for their 'Greater East-Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' did include acquisition of New Guinea and the islands of Melanesia in the South Western Pacific. Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Kiribati variously experienced Japanese incursions and occupation during the War. But Japanese naval plans did aim at eventually occupying Fiji, New Caledonia, and Samoa to block the sea routes between Australia and the United States.

This experience is perhaps relevant only in so far as it illustrates that the affected and neighbouring South Pacific states have known hostility and one would expect that they would be very wary and resistant to any future attempt at subjugation. But it may also help to explain either their desire to maintain very close association with their allies in that conflict (for

example Papua New Guinea with Australia and the US) or to adopt a position of non-alignment (as in the case of Vanuatu).<sup>2</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1. A detailed account, centred on British interests, is contained in W.P.Morrell, Britain in the Pacific Islands, Oxford, 1960.
2. Vanuatu, then the New Hebrides, was not occupied by the Japanese but was well placed for and did support Allied forces operating in the Pacific Theatre.

### PART 3

#### CURRENT STATUS OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC STATES

##### ECONOMIC ASPECTS

With the exception of Australia and New Zealand, the economies of the Region vary from being almost entirely subsistence, as in the case of Kiribati post 1981, to one product dependence as in Nauru. Per capita GNP ranges from \$US 417 in Kiribati to \$US 20 000 in Nauru, with most other states less than \$US 1000.<sup>1</sup> Many island states depend on agricultural products as their major means of generating the foreign currency so necessary to purchase fuel, machinery, and manufactured goods, although only Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and New Caledonia have substantial agricultural bases. There is a heavy reliance on cash aid to fill the gap between exports and imports. The US, Australia, and New Zealand are the major aid donors, while France supports the economies of its overseas territories.

Where trade is significant, it is largely confined to Australia, New Zealand, the US, UK and Japan. Australia in particular has a special tariff system applying to imports from

the South Pacific. But in all of those countries, trade now faces competition from both alternative suppliers and the need for protection of domestic producers in the developed countries . Furthermore, the difficulty in expanding trade in agricultural products is not so much that the world could not use more food -starvation in parts of the third world, such as Ethiopia, are testimony to that - but in transportation resources and the ability of the countries most in need of food imports to pay for them.

Fishing offers some prospect for diversifying the limited agriculturally based economies, but indications are that these resources could only be effectively exploited through joint ventures with extra-territorial partners. Alternatively, some countries, for example Kiribati, have had or are exploring licensing agreements for access to resources within the almost universally declared 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zones. The United States, Taiwan, the Peoples Republic of China, the Soviet Union and Japan already fish extensively in the Region and are moving to establish such licensing or cooperative arrangements. The attraction of such agreements to the island states is that they are commercial contracts as distinct from receiving that income in the form of aid, and in many instances they also offer infrastructure development opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Some countries, notably Fiji and Tonga, rely very heavily on tourism as a major source of income. But there are also limits

to the expansion potential of this industry, and it is very susceptible to changing economic conditions and currency exchange rates in the Pacific Rim countries which account for the majority of tourists. Tourism also requires to be in balance with infrastructure development and population growth. These island states remain economically fragile, and as there will for some time be limitations on their ability to support large populations, so the expansion of tourism may have to be restrained.

Land based natural resources remain scarce; confined mainly to copper mining in Papua New Guinea and residual phosphate mining in Nauru. However, off-shore resource exploration has to date been limited and this potential remains largely unknown.

The major economic problems facing the region could be summarized as follows:

- Fast population growth, averaging 2.5 percent per year, but not accompanied by commensurate economic growth and infrastructure development.
- A drift of young village people to towns and cities in search of a 'better lifestyle' to that offered in the rural communities.
- Declining food self-sufficiency, probably as a result of the two factors above, but due in part also to poor soil conditions on many

of the islands.

- Health problems arising from the consumption of imported processed foods which have caused rapid changes in dietary patterns for the indigenous peoples.
- Declining export earnings due to weak commodity prices.
- Extensive cyclone damage in recent months, most notably in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the Cook Islands.

#### POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

While the populations of the islands vary from Polynesian to Melanesian and Micronesian, with smaller groupings of Europeans, Chinese, Indian and other Asians, they all have political systems established basically along Western lines. Significant also is that the dominant religion is Christianity.

In the generally successful transition from colonialism to independence, cultural traditions within the island groupings have largely been maintained. Colonialism had not subjugated the island peoples to lifestyles or value systems more appropriate to Europe than the South Pacific. Nor did it result in excessive

immigration of Europeans or other racial groups with cultures quite foreign to the Region. Missionary influence has been responsible for the high level of converts to Christianity. And the democratic parliamentary political systems have been accepted because they have not been found to be in conflict with the native social customs.

#### The South Pacific Forum

The South Pacific Forum (SPF) is the dominant regional association. Thirteen nations belong to it. It grew out of the more formal structure of the South Pacific Commission, and now provides a valuable mechanism for discussion of regional problems and the resolution of minor inter-state disputes.

The Forum is political but economic issues have been raised periodically. Significantly, it has no defence function and is even less likely than the ASEAN states to see any value in the commitment of member states to any defence related intra-regional agreements, treaties, or formal alliances.<sup>3</sup>

But those who may doubt the Forum's capacity to respond to any internal issue might reflect on the effective way in which Papua New Guinea committed elements of its Defence Force to assist the Government of Vanuatu in maintaining internal law and order during the Santos rebellion, immediately after that country gained its independence in July 1980.

Australia and New Zealand belong to the SPF. They have taken an active role in underwriting some of the economic development initiatives, such as the Forum Shipping Line, but have carefully avoided any accusation that they are exerting unreasonable influence over the Forum processes.<sup>4</sup>

Only one member of the SPF formally describes its status as 'non-aligned'. Vanuatu's foreign policy is 'liberationist', and unlike most other South Pacific nations, it has demonstrated its independence in international affairs by establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Libya before announcing in late 1986 its intention to open diplomatic relations with the US.

Collectively, the SPF views France's continued colonial occupation in the South Pacific as an anachronism, and its nuclear testing program as objectionable. But its approaches to the United Nations on these issues, particularly the recent request to place New Caledonia on the list of non-self-governing territories under the oversight of the UN Committee on Decolonization, earned it a sharp French rebuke.

## DEFENCE CAPABILITIES

Without a substantial resource base and indeed without any identifiable internal or direct external threat, there has been neither the means nor the need to establish any significant defence capabilities within the smaller island states. It is fair to suggest that until recently, ANZUS provided a defence umbrella which appeared to satisfy the needs of most islanders. Some islands of course remain dependent for their defence on France or New Zealand.

The proclamation by island states of exclusive economic and fishing zones extending some 200 miles from their shores has generated an awareness of the need for some off-shore surveillance capabilities in the Region. New Zealand is attempting to fill this void, and Australia is making a limited contribution. But the nations themselves are exploring ways of obtaining independent means of coastal surveillance to safeguard national sovereignty.

Next to Australia and New Zealand, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force is the largest in the Region, attracting some three percent of that Nation's annual budget. Australia had a key role in the development of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, and continues to provide support by way of materiel and training. But

that Force has a primary mission of providing internal security and is very limited in its capacity to resist external threats. It would quite naturally turn to Australia to support it against any external aggression, and as Australia's security cannot be separated from the security of PNG, some form of assistance could be assured.

Perhaps the only other defence force of any size in the Region is that of Fiji. That Fiji saw fit to use its limited defence assets to provide a contribution to the peacekeeping forces in the Middle East is an indication of that Country's willingness to accept international obligations beyond its immediate region and not directly related to its own security.

In summary, continued security in the South Pacific will depend very heavily on the power projection capabilities of the United States, the more limited naval, air and ground force contribution to defence needs which Australia and New Zealand could provide in peace and in times of threat, and possibly the French military forces located in French overseas territories in the Region. The smaller island states cannot do more than provide a limited contribution towards their own defence now or in the foreseeable future.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Source: Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, Washington, 1986.
2. The desire to reduce this dependence on cash aid was well put by Michael Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, in addressing a seminar in Sydney in June 1982. He said 'Giving a man a tin of fish to feed his family is aid; teaching a man how to seal that fish in a can is development'. One could add that providing a market for the canned fish promotes growth through trade.
3. An outline proposal for a regional defence plan was raised by Mr Lange, the New Zealand Prime Minister, at the SPF meeting in August 1985. Critics claim that this move by Mr Lange was to ward off criticism of New Zealand's nuclear ships ban. It received only limited attention at that meeting and does not appear to have been seriously pursued since.
4. This view is not shared by all. At a conference held in Sydney over the weekend 26/27 April 1986 by the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Coordinating Committee, Australia was described variously as a 'bully', and exploiter. It was accused of erecting discriminatory barriers against island exports, and being coercive to the South Pacific Forum. However, notwithstanding these accusations, Australia was preferred to the 'capricious' Americans. Source: "Australia seen as the local bully by some S Pacific islands", Sydney Morning Herald, 28 April 1986.

PART 4  
ISSUES AFFECTING PEACE AND STABILITY

SOVIET EXPANSIONISM

World domination, the ultimate outcome of the Marxist-Leninist based 'class struggle', remains a basic tenet of Soviet doctrine. And there is not necessarily any hurry to achieve it. In the Soviet's view, the obstacle to this objective remains the United States. We therefore might expect the Soviet Union to exploit actual or perceived vulnerabilities of the United States, its friends or allies. In this context, the disruption of the ANZUS Alliance resulting from the New Zealand Government's decision to ban visits to its ports by nuclear armed or powered warships was seized upon by the Soviet Union as a 'desirable development'; judging by that country's substantial increase in public relations activity in Wellington since early 1986. Further, it is more than co- incidental that in the wake of Kiribati's displeasure over exploitation of its tuna fish resources by US fishermen, the Soviet Union should be the first nation to offer financial rewards in return for licensed access to nationally controlled fishing areas. Finally, one must be

cautious at the enthusiasm with which the Soviet Union is extending its diplomatic accreditation in the larger South Pacific states, including Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Notwithstanding these developments, there is a need to place Soviet activities into perspective. In his article 'Soviet Strategy Towards Australia, New Zealand and the South-West Pacific', Paul Dibb, a leading commentator on Soviet strategic issues, observes that:

The USSR's vital national security interests are not directly engaged in this part of the world - with the important exception of US military and intelligence facilities in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

He urges that we take account of the relative priorities of the Soviet Union which cannot be 'equally powerful in every part of the world'<sup>2</sup> and which is currently stretched with maintaining its nuclear balance with the US, projecting its military power in Europe, and containing the Chinese along its extensive southern border. One could add that their active support of surrogates in prolonged engagements in Kampuchea and Afghanistan must also be taking its toll in both military and economic terms.

History has shown that protection of motherland Russia from attack has been the strongest drive behind the militarization of the Soviet people. It has also been used as justification for the effective extension of the Soviet borders over time. The pretext

of 'protective buffers' was the basis for the acquisition of much of Soviet Central Asia, and for the more recent Sovietization of the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The Soviets have previously been largely concerned with land forces. But in the post World War II period under Admiral Gorshkov, the growth of the Soviet Navy has added substantially to their power projection capability. They can now challenge US interests further afield than ever before. Access to Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam has greatly enhanced their capabilities in the Pacific, and this has allowed them to take an increased interest in the South Pacific.<sup>3</sup>

#### Soviet Interests in the South Pacific

Legitimate Soviet activity in the Region centres on trade, fishing, and oceanographic research. Underlying these is its desire to achieve greater influence and overcome the obstacles to its regional penetration posed by the ANZUS Alliance and the tyranny of distance.<sup>4</sup>

Soviet trade is predominantly with Australia and New Zealand, and is heavily in favour of those two countries. It is now worth more than \$US 1200 million annually. For Australia, the Soviet Union is the eleventh largest export market with principal commodities being wool, wheat, sugar, and dairy products. The Soviet Union is the fifth or sixth largest export market for New Zealand, accepting carpet wool, meat, and dairy products.

Open ocean fishing activity by Soviet trawling fleets has extended further afield in recent years because of limitations imposed by the declaration of 200 mile fishing zones by northern Pacific countries, and the increased consumption of this important source of protein in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union already fishes extensively in the South Pacific and its fleet makes periodic port calls in New Zealand and Fiji for resupply and crew rest. Indeed, it is often overlooked that the Soviet Union has access to a permanent base in New Zealand, although their activities in that country are closely monitored and subject to restrictions.

The concern with Soviet fishing activity is in the recent offers of joint research and development projects with the smaller Pacific island states which see fishing exploitation as the saviour of their declining economies. The Soviets understand the appeal all too well. As early as 1983 they were advocating agreements for joint studies in fishing research and the creation of joint enterprises to catch and process seafoods. We have now seen that this program has been partly successful with the negotiation in May 1986 of an agreement with Vanuatu to take over the development and operation of the former Japanese facilities on the northern island of Espiritu Santo.

If one considers further the close working relationship between the Soviet merchant marine and the Soviet Navy, it is

clear that fishing activity provides cover and legitimacy to both intelligence gathering and communications capabilities. This concern is reinforced when one considers that the recently discontinued agreement to fish in Kiribati waters cost the Soviet Union far more than the tuna fish catch was ever likely to be worth.

Oceanography also serves both civil and military purposes. It is therefore of concern to reflect on Paul Dibb's conclusion that 'The Soviet Union probably knows more about the oceanography of the South Pacific than any other country.'<sup>5</sup> It has been in the Region for some 30 years and it would be reasonable to conclude that its data would be useful in any future contingency calling for deployment of sub-surface naval forces in the Region. In the more immediate future, its knowledge of the potential worth of any off-shore mineral deposits could well be used to ease its entry into joint ventures in this area.

#### Pacific State Relations with the Soviet Union

The states of the South Pacific are generally both ideologically and religiously opposed to communism. They are suspicious of the Soviet Union, and would wish to avoid any superpower rivalry within their Region. One might then ask why the Soviet Union has so successfully established diplomatic relations in the Region (albeit mostly non-resident), why both Kiribati and Vanuatu have negotiated fishing agreements,

and why Papua New Guinea has recently suggested that it too would consider any appropriate offer which Moscow may make.

There are perhaps four explanations:

- Firstly, the states are mindful that Australia, New Zealand and the United States have very substantial diplomatic arrangements with the Soviet Union, and they trade freely (even to the extent of the US proposing recently to subsidize grain sales). New Zealand offers port facilities to the Soviet trawler fleet. And even in 1979, Tasmania was actively pursuing a proposal to establish a major Soviet fishing base in Hobart - disrupted only by the political response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The island states see no reason why they may not be at liberty to follow these examples.
- Secondly, Soviet offers are seen as sound economic propositions. In most cases, they are so favourable to the Pacific states that they are financially disadvantageous to the Soviets. But more importantly to the Region is that commercial arrangements are preferred over the option of direct cash aid so often provided by Western countries to sustain the local economies. Commercial ventures are seen as a path to greater

economic independence, and bring with them some prospects for infrastructure development and expanded markets.

- There must also be some tendency to play the Soviet card, knowing that this will attract the attention of otherwise neglectful Western nations. There is the real prospect that Soviet aid will be matched by or exceeded by economic assistance from the US, Australia, or New Zealand.
- Finally, it is understandable that newly independent nations would want to demonstrate their independence by establishing diplomatic and commercial relations with others in the world community irrespective of ideology. It is reasonable to assume that such relationships, properly conducted, demonstrate a political maturity and dispel any suggestion of subservience to any particular regional or extra-regional power.

Taking these propositions into account, there is a strong rationale for the developments of the past three years, even though they are inimical to Western interests. However, we should also appreciate just what limitations may have been imposed by the Pacific states themselves in their dealings with the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

### The Soviet Threat

There are several contradictory views on the Soviet threat in the South Pacific. Some might argue, for example, that the Soviets will follow a course here similar to that applied elsewhere in the Third World. They will endeavour to influence newly independent island states through offers of economic assistance, including fishing agreements discussed above. More importantly is the foothold which access to fishing zones may eventually offer, because the next request would be for ship porting - either just for repairs or victualling. Then would come an offer to construct an airfield to fly in relief crews. And so the commercial activity generated could provide a cover for the military activity forecast by Admiral Lyons.<sup>3</sup>

The opposing view is best articulated by Paul Dibb. He acknowledges<sup>7</sup> that the Soviets will exploit opportunities, but he points out that there remains strong resistance by the South West Pacific people towards communism or any sort of enforced colonialism. While he records elsewhere that 'Current strategic guidance... also notes that access by the Soviet Union, especially the establishment there of a presence ashore, would be cause for concern'<sup>8</sup>, he also suggests that 'It is a long way from fisheries access to the development of a major base capable of supporting military forces that could threaten Australia.'<sup>9</sup>

The arguments are all valid in that they presuppose either specific Soviet intentions or reflect actual or potential capabilities. The difficulty is that such assumptions may prove incorrect. It might therefore be prudent to lean towards the view that the Soviets do indeed plan on becoming a force to be reckoned with in the South Pacific. No clearer indication of this could be given than General Secretary Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech on 28 July 1986. While he bemoaned the fact that 'The nations in the region are being dragged into blocs', and that 'The Pacific Region hasn't yet been militarised as much as Europe but the potentialities of its militarisation are truly immense and the consequences very dangerous', his solution 'that we favour integrating the Asia-Pacific region into the general process of establishing a comprehensive system of international security'<sup>10</sup> leaves little room for interpretation of Soviet objectives.

What confirms Gorbachev's stated intentions was the concurrent creation within the Soviet Foreign Ministry of a Pacific Ocean Department.

This study concludes that the Soviet Union will exploit opportunities within the South Pacific Region as they arise. Access to fishing rights, encouragement of the breakdown in ANZUS, and the difficulties being experienced by France in New Caledonia, are but some of these. Time is not important. Their

approach will be incremental as the Region clearly has low priority in terms of the Soviet's global objectives and current capabilities. They will, none-the-less, increase their presence as a direct challenge to US dominance. But in doing so, they will avoid the possibility of any direct confrontation with the US and will seek legitimacy for their presence.

#### FRENCH INTERESTS

France has held territories in the South Pacific for more than 125 years. Its remaining possessions include French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, and New Caledonia.

Two issues currently give most cause for concern:

- Continuation of nuclear testing in the region, in defiance of concerted efforts by South Pacific nations to halt such testing.
- The push for autonomy or independence within New Caledonia, against the wishes of the French Government.

#### French Nuclear Testing

At the heart of France's determination to hold its ground in the South Pacific, and specifically at Mururoa in French Polynesia, is the French nuclear modernization program. France

remains a nuclear power because it cannot be sure that the United States would use its nuclear weapons in France's defence. While it may be unlikely to begin a nuclear exchange, France relies on the deterrent effect of its nuclear capability to support its defence posture on Europe.

The nuclear modernization program involves both qualitative and quantitative improvements, and covers the SSBN force and Mirage aircraft. Improvements in the accuracy and range of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons are sought.

Mururoa has served the testing program well for many years. The French clearly consider it impractical to conduct testing, no matter how limited, in Europe, and they do not wish to use US facilities for fear that their capability will come to be regarded as merely an extension of the US arsenal. The Sahara Desert, site of earlier testing programs, is no longer available.

France addresses both the need for the tests and their safety in these terms:

We mean to continue our tests. The object is to test the quality and reliability of the nuclear warheads on our missiles. The five nuclear powers in the World are conducting this kind of test and will go on doing so, and I repeat that there is no environmental risk whatsoever... France has never accepted, and never will accept, that any organization or country whatsoever should be able to influence her defence policy.<sup>11</sup>

Maintenance of the nuclear testing base is regarded as one of the major industries in French Polynesia.<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of sovereign rights, there can be little argument with the French position. While there have been accusations of atmospheric and water pollution resulting from the tests and extending beyond French Polynesia, the evidence is inconclusive as to whether the tests are environmentally detrimental. And despite the frequent formal objections made by regional states, and particularly Australia, France has not seen fit to modify its stance. Even the 1985 sinking in Auckland of the Greenpeace ship 'Rainbow Warrior', then preparing to disrupt the testing, and the subsequent embarrassment at the disclosure of direct French Government involvement, have not caused any apparent modification to French attitudes.

The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, discussed later in this section, was developed largely in response to France's testing program. It represents the South Pacific Forum's collective concern at the continuation of testing, its possible environmental consequences, and by implication, the potential which France's presence is seen to have in causing unrest in the eastern part of the Region. But in turn, one must consider whether this orchestrated opposition is not in itself destabilizing, generating as it does a great deal of antipathy between nations which are all Western inclined and decidedly anti-Soviet.

The United States is mindful of this, and its respect for France's position in NATO has disposed it towards siding with that country rather than with the South Pacific states.

#### New Caledonian Independence

In exploring the rationale behind France's reluctance to accede to pressures both within New Caledonia and now in the United Nations<sup>13</sup> to move towards independence, one cannot escape the linkage between the nuclear testing ground at Mururoa in French Polynesia, and New Caledonia.

Denis Warner argues that:

If the connection between New Caledonia and Mururoa, 4000 kilometres to the east across the Pacific, may seem obscure, the significance becomes apparent in the logistics of the nuclear testing program.<sup>14</sup>

He goes on to explain the role of New Caledonia in the 'quite fragile chain of communications' for naval support coming eastward through the Indian Ocean.

Under pressure from the indigenous Melanesians, being 44 percent of the population and represented principally by the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), the former French Socialist Government had agreed to a plan (known as the Fabius Plan) leading to independence. But the change in government in France in March 1986 disrupted this plan. While the Chirac Government has committed itself to a referendum on independence by July 1987, it has made no secret of its desire to

see New Caledonia remain part of France, and believes that to be the wish of the majority of New Caledonia's residents.

The difficulty in what seems to be a fundamentally fair and democratic approach is that the Kanaks believe that only indigenous Melanesians should vote and that any other arrangement would cause them to boycott the referendum. In the process, and with encouragement from elsewhere, most notably Vanuatu and Libya, they have become militant. The potential therefore exists for civil war.

It is France's intention to remain in New Caledonia for the foreseeable future. Their recent announcement to improve the naval facilities and airfield in Noumea is a clear indication of this.

The concessions granted by the Chirac Government in terms of regional autonomy and the referendum have placated neither the Kanaks, who demand independence now, nor the South Pacific Forum countries, who believe that independence is desirable but seem less certain about how it may be peacefully achieved. But France clearly has right on its side - legally and perhaps even morally. New Caledonia is a French territory. It can be argued that Australia, or indeed the UN General Assembly, have no right to interfere with what are clearly the internal affairs of another country.

### Discussion of French Interests

For strategic and defence reasons, France argues that it needs to retain its South Pacific territories. Mururoa is critical to nuclear testing, and New Caledonia is essential to logistical support of that program. France will not 'impose' independence on New Caledonia unless it can be assured that the majority of the population favours that.

It could also be argued that France contributes both to the economy of the Region, through trade and aid to its territories, and defence through its substantial military presence.<sup>15</sup> It may not have the confidence of the South Pacific Forum countries, and has been diplomatically hostile towards Australia for its role in both the Nuclear Free Zone Treaty sponsorship and the approach to the UN Committee on Decolonization. (Indeed, only recently, it expelled Australia's Consul-General in Noumea for what it alleged to be interference beyond the bounds of normal diplomatic activity.) But conversely, its position and actions have not been openly challenged by the US, and France itself argues that its presence would help in limiting Soviet encroachment.

The questions to be addressed are:

- Does France's presence and position on nuclear testing and New Caledonian independence contribute to regional instability; or
- Is it the concerted opposition to France's

presence which is causing the problem?

Put another way, if the South Pacific states (including Australia and New Zealand) were to respect France's right to sovereignty of its remaining territories, would the Region be better off? If they were to work with France in coming to some basic understanding, would this not establish consensus on Western interests which could well enhance regional stability?

This study concludes that the confrontation between the SPF countries and France is not conducive to regional stability. While France has a sound legal position for maintaining its rights within the Region, it would perhaps do well to recognize the concerns of the SPF states and adopt a more sensitive approach to the way in which it conducts its affairs. On the other hand, the SPF countries must see that France does not intend to leave, and should seek some accommodation with that country. It is quite reasonable to suggest that the position taken by Australia, New Zealand and the other SPF countries is itself destabilizing in that it has created friction between elements which are Western oriented and leaves the way open for exploitation by other ideologies.

## OTHER EXTRA-TERRITORIAL INTERESTS

### China

It was as recently as 20 years ago that Australians were looking upon China as a threat to their security. As Rawdon Dalrymple noted:

The war in Vietnam had been to a large extent presented to Australians as a campaign to prevent the downward thrust of communism and specifically of Chinese Communist power and control.<sup>16</sup>

But then President Nixon's historic visit to China in 1971, followed by a change in government in Australia in 1972, opened up a productive Chinese-Western dialogue which continues to develop for the better.

China has established diplomatic missions in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Western Samoa, and Australia. Its effective diplomacy has given encouragement to newly independent South Pacific states. It has an affinity with them as it shares many of the economic problems which the regional countries face. China is not seen as threatening, and it seeks to cooperate in a limited way with regional countries - much as it has demonstrated in Africa.

To determine why China has shown such an interest in the Region one might consider its need to compete with Taiwan which

separately maintains diplomatic relations with four of the smaller states.

While China is accepted within the Region, there is concern that their successes will aggravate extant Sino-Soviet tensions and encourage the Soviet Union to be rather more aggressive. In the longer term, Sino-Soviet competition could be just as destabilizing as Soviet-US competition, although somewhat less likely.

It would therefore seem appropriate to capitalize on China's improving relations with the West, to encourage their involvement in the Region, and so present the Soviet Union with a formidable obstacle to achieving influence.

#### Japanese Influence

Their brief occupation of South West Pacific islands during World War II left a legacy of hatred and mistrust of the Japanese which has only recently been overcome. Most nations in the South Pacific now regard Japan favourably and have some respect for their economic growth and development.

In turn, the Japanese have been a force for the good in this Region. They are now one of Australia's largest trading partners, and they have established substantial economic interests in Papua New Guinea and other island states.

Japan is closely allied with Western interests. Its particular interests in extending its fishing industry into the Region could offer scope for favourable commercial arrangements as a counter to Soviet offers. However, its experience in Vanuatu, where such a joint venture encountered financial difficulties, has caused the opposite effect. (The Soviet Union has been able to move in and make an attractive offer to revive the activity.)

#### Libya

In May 1986, Vanuatu announced that it would establish diplomatic relations with Libya. Even as early as the mid-1970s, Libya had offered aid to Tonga and is now actively involved in training and supporting the more extreme faction of the Kanak independence movement (FLNKS) in New Caledonia.

The involvement of Libya, the only country without an identifiable strategic interest in the Region, is cause for concern. Their dealings with Vanuatu are consistent with that country's liberationist foreign policy and 'non-aligned' status. But their more recent involvement in New Caledonia has added a new and decidedly destabilizing dimension to that dispute. Fortunately, the mainstream FLNKS organization has had some reservations about dealing with the Libyans, but the possibility exists that the FULK (United Front for Kanaks Liberation) faction, one of the minor parties in the loose FLNKS coalition,

may break with the mainstream organization and pursue a more violent course with Libyan materiel and training support.

We have cause to be concerned with Libyan influence in the Region, bringing with it values and interests quite inconsistent with both Western and South Pacific ideals. However, on this point we again leave ourselves open to accusations of hypocrisy. When criticized over its acceptance of Libya, Vanuatu officials pointed out that the biggest act of terrorism so far in the South Pacific was committed not by Libya but by France's sinking of the 'Rainbow Warrior' in Auckland.

Western concern is not just at Libyan involvement but at possible Soviet moves to take advantage of the instability which Libya will most likely create.

#### THE SOUTH PACIFIC NUCLEAR FREE ZONE TREATY

Also referred to as the Treaty of Rarotonga, the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZT):

- prohibits the manufacture, testing, acquisition, or stationing of nuclear weapons in the Region;
- invites the nuclear powers with interests in the Region to apply the Treaty to their territories, not to use or threaten the use of

- nuclear weapons, or to test them in the South Pacific; but
- allows transit rights for nuclear powered or armed ships, and for each sovereign state to determine its own policy on ship or aircraft visits.

The Treaty had its origins in a New Zealand proposal of 1975, developed largely in response to concerns at both continued testing of nuclear weapons in the Region by France, and suggestions that the US and Japan in particular were examining the possibilities for dumping nuclear waste in the area.

That New Zealand proposal, while generally supported by South Pacific nations, was too broad and ill-defined to encourage the US to commit its support. In particular, it appeared to curtail traditional freedoms of the high seas, and placed limitations on the ability of the US to continue to guarantee security within the Region. While the New Zealand proposal received majority support in the UN General Assembly, it lapsed when the governments in both New Zealand and Australia changed in late 1975.

The present SPNFZT was initiated by Australia in 1983 at the South Pacific Forum conference. It was based on the earlier New Zealand proposal, but attempted to overcome its inherent limitations. For Australia, it furthered that country's stated

arms control objectives within the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But again, continued nuclear testing by France was at the core of the initiative.

After some initial reservations, a draft treaty was developed and largely agreed at the 1985 Forum meeting.

The Treaty has now been ratified by most if not all of the Forum members. However, despite a conscious effort by Australia to accommodate US concerns and to ensure that the US can still make a positive contribution to regional security, the US has declined to sign the protocols. It continues to see the Treaty as potentially limiting US activities in the Region. Not surprisingly, France has also not signed.

What then is the value of the Treaty? Dr F.A.Mediansky noted in 1985 that:

...the SPNFZT would not be without irony in that those nuclear weapon states whose activities are not the cause of widespread regional concern would accept the zone while at the same time the zone would fail to restrain the one nuclear power whose testing activities are largely instrumental in generating the proposal in the first place.<sup>17</sup>

The Treaty does serve as a regional expression of concern, which of course applies a degree of pressure to those who either do not accede to it or who contravene it. But beyond that must be the realization that nations will always adopt policies which best serve their national interests at the time. Nations which accede to a treaty or its protocols would most probably do so on the

basis that the treaty merely describes how they would react in any case. Nations, such as in this case France and the US, have not signed because it is inimical to their interests. So the SPNFZT is little more than an expression of regional concern, and its greatest value is perhaps to be found in its domestic political appeal within Australia and New Zealand. As a proposal for change or as a guarantee of influence or control, its value should not be over-estimated.

The negative effects of the Treaty are now to be found in the Region's relations with the United States. Soviet opportunism will most certainly exploit the refusal of the US to conform with the island states' wishes. And while the US would still wish to offer its security, its ability to move freely and be widely accepted have been jeopardized.

This study concludes that the SPNFZT is ineffectual and if anything, detrimental to Western security interests in the South Pacific.

#### THE ANZUS ALLIANCE

The ANZUS Treaty was drawn up in 1951. It provides for Australia, New Zealand, and the United States to consult and take action, each country 'in accordance with its constitutional

processes<sup>18</sup> in the event of a threat to the forces or territories of any party in the Pacific Region.

There is no full time staff or secretariat, nor has there been any joint contingency planning by ANZUS partners. The Treaty has not been invoked and some might even argue that this is a measure of its deterrent value in the Pacific.

What the Treaty has provided over the years has been a framework for substantial defence cooperation between the parties. Such cooperation has included exchange of intelligence and scientific information, access by Australia and New Zealand to high technology, and logistic support arrangements. In return, the US has established three Joint Defence Facilities in Australia, for long range communication and surveillance purposes, and has been afforded transit and visiting rights for aircraft and ships in pursuit of its wider global interests.

The future of the Treaty was called into question when the Labor Government was elected in New Zealand in July 1984. That Government was committed to the prohibition of visits by nuclear armed or powered vessels and aircraft.

In the US view, denial of port access for its ships because of its 'neither confirm nor deny' nuclear status policy, constituted a breach of faith in respect of the philosophy of the ANZUS Treaty. The US felt that it could not continue a security

arrangement with a country which could not accept visits by its Naval vessels. Its subsequent action of withdrawing its security obligations to New Zealand was also meant to impress upon other allies that an alliance has responsibilities as well as benefits.

Much has been written about the New Zealand action and its implications. The facts will not be restated here. What this study is concerned with is the effect that this disagreement is having on security in the South Pacific.

ANZUS was the means by which the smaller island states derived their protection. The dominant regional powers, Australia and New Zealand, through their US association, were able to foster a sense of strategic community without the need for direct superpower involvement. Now there is uncertainty, particularly for those states most closely tied to New Zealand. But more importantly, Soviet objectives for the Region have been enhanced by such a major disruption in a US alliance, despite warnings from the New Zealand Government that this situation should not be taken as an opportunity for Soviet interference.

Australia will continue to have close working relationships with the US, and irrespective of the future status of the Treaty, there will be little practical effect on the interchange between these two countries. But should the Treaty be formally dissolved, then its deterrent value will be negated and this would be of significant concern to Australia.<sup>19</sup>

New Zealand is less likely to be directly threatened than Australia, which is a factor contributing no doubt to its apparent disregard for the consequences of its nuclear ships ban. It is conceivable that only a change of government would see ANZUS reinstated, and that the later this change occurs, the less likely such reinstatement would be. There will remain strong defence links between Australia and New Zealand, but in the long term, it will be the New Zealand Defence Force which will most feel the effects of its loss of direct contact with the US Services. The critical issue for New Zealand then is to determine what US response might be forthcoming should New Zealand interests in the Region be directly threatened. The US has made it clear that it sees itself under no formal obligation to assist.

This study concludes that the withdrawal of US military contacts with New Zealand, and suspension of security obligations to that country under ANZUS, have had a destabilizing effect in the Region. They have reduced the value of the major security shield for South Pacific states, and lessened the resolve of the US to counter aggression against New Zealand and its interests. In doing so, opportunities have been created for interventionists to penetrate the Region with less risk than before. The deterrent value of ANZUS has been substantially negated.

## ENDNOTES

1. Paul Dibb, Soviet Strategy Towards Australia, New Zealand and the South West Pacific, (First published as Working Paper No 90, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU Canberra.) p.1.
2. Ibid.
3. In the Canberra Times on 13 May 1986, Admiral James Lyons, Commander US Pacific Fleet, is reported to have expressed concern that Soviet spy ships would soon move into the Region and challenge US interests.
4. It is more than 6000 kilometres from Vladivostok to Northern Australia, and, even taking account of its access to Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, this distance is only reduced by some 2300 kilometres.
5. Dibb, p.6.
6. Kiribati's fishing license agreement was more cautiously negotiated than most commentators appear to recognize. For example, in keeping with its treaty of friendship with the United States and its inherent strategic denial clauses, Kiribati had precluded any port access for Soviet vessels, landing rights for Soviet aircraft, or stationing of Soviet personnel. In short, Kiribati has confirmed its pro-Western stance and regarded its now concluded fishing arrangement purely as a commercial venture.
7. Dibb, p.3.
8. Paul Dibb, Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities, p.49.
9. Ibid, p.33. This comment refers specifically to threats to Australia, but the general thrust applies to other South Pacific states.
10. Mikhail Gorbachev, Asia and the Pacific Region, as recorded in 'Vital Speeches of the Day', Vol LII No 23, 15 September 1986, pp. 706-711.
11. Paul Quiles, (then Minister of Defence), in a speech to the French National Assembly on 2 October 1985: As recorded by Denis Warner, The Pacific isn't pacific, Pacific Defence Reporter, February 1986, p.29.
12. Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, 1986, p.86.

13. The United Nations General Assembly voted on the reinscription of New Caledonia to the list of non-self-governing territories on 2 December 1986. That resolution was sponsored by the SPF countries, but supported by, among others, the ASEAN countries, China and Japan.

14. Denis Warner, "The Pacific isn't pacific", Pacific Defence Reporter, February 1986, p.29.

15. For example, there are about 8000 troops in New Caledonia alone, including a marine infantry regiment and an infantry company supported by C-160 transport aircraft, and a small Fleet Air Arm detachment.

16. Rawdon Dalrymple (Australian Ambassador to the United States), On Being a Superpower's Ally : The Case of Australia, speech to the Southern Center for International Studies, Washington D.C., 27 June 1986.

17. Dr F.A.Mediansky, "The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone", Asia-Pacific Defense Forum, Special supplement Winter 1985-86, p.29.

18. ANZUS Treaty, Article 4, 29 April 1952.

19. A Morgan Gallup Poll conducted in Australia in Feb-Mar 1985 indicated that about three in every four Australians favoured a defence alliance with the US, based on their perception of Australia's security needs.

PART 5  
THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT AND ITS NATURE

THE CAUSES OF WAR

It might be useful to begin the examination of potential conflict situations in the Region by reviewing some current theses on the causes of war, based largely on historical evidence.

In 'War and Politics', Bernard Brodie examines some traditional reasons which lead nations to become militarily involved. He suggests that states will enter into conflict if there is an expectation that the military outcome will be successful, the costs tolerable, and that 'more evil to the state will ultimately result from not going to war than from doing so'.<sup>1</sup> But he cautions that 'Traditional views on vital interests may, like other old ideas, outlive whatever usefulness they once had'.<sup>2</sup> He goes on to argue that behaviour leading to war does not always appear rational. History is replete with examples to support this, most recently Argentina's attempt to

capture the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) from Great Britain in 1982.<sup>3</sup>

On the use of history, Brodie quotes Arthur Schlesinger: 'There can be no question that generalizations about the past, defective as they may be, are possible - and that they can strengthen the capacity of statesmen to deal with the future'.<sup>4</sup> We might be cautious in applying generalizations from history to the South Pacific. But we can turn to the experiences of decolonization, and the struggle for independence and economic growth, which create pressures on fragile political structures. The African continent is testimony to that.

Some wars have been attributed to economic factors but Brodie's conclusion is that this cause is somewhat over-rated. However, notwithstanding that increasing economic interdependence tends to be a factor for world stability, there remains concern that conflict could arise out of a number of economic related situations including:

- Denial of commodities which affect standards of living (most recently, oil shortages which could well have evoked a willingness to seek a military solution in defence of the 'national interest').
- A breakdown in economic order which encourages the introduction of communist ideologies, civil

unrest, and a greater gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Perhaps Ethiopia is one example of this.

- A desire for greater economic control, as exemplified by Japan's quest for their 'Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere' which led that country ultimately into World War II.<sup>5</sup>

There are also psychological and political motivations for engaging in conflict. A psychological cause may be when some countries feel morally or racially superior, and sense a need to apply their values and standards to others. The clearest example in modern times is Nazi Germany, which drew its strength from a conviction that theirs was the master race destined to rule Europe. The Japanese of course were not without similar convictions so far as their conquests in Korea, Manchuria and other parts of Asia were concerned. Intimidation may be an early sign of psychological forces at work, as more powerful nations apply pressure for change, or coerce smaller nations into siding with them on international issues. Indeed, the Soviet technique of infiltrating the political and economic structure of a country to encourage its downfall or ideological transformation is primarily a psychological one. Nicaragua might be an appropriate example. Military overconfidence (the Falklands War), the absence of empathy, and a diabolical enemy image are other reasons which Brodie<sup>6</sup> groups under this category.

One might regard the United States' action against Libya in 1986 as a psychological response to the inability of Western democracies to curb terrorism. It fortunately did not escalate into a more serious confrontation.

Closely related to psychological causes of war are political causes. Such wars as are fought for 'national liberation', or to retain the balance of power in a region, may fall into this category, as might a colonial power's defence of its territories against internal or external aggression. This is not to suggest that psychological or economic factors are not also present. But it is the political basis which offers the legitimacy for nations waging war.

The North Korean invasion of the South in June 1950 was to achieve the political objective of re-unifying the Korean Nation. The United Nations response, largely through the absence of the Soviet Union at that time, was to oppose re-unification by force, or indeed any re-unification predicated on imposing communism over the entire peninsular.

In later discussion of conflict prevention, some attention will be given to defensive measures which the island states may take. Here, it is necessary to suggest that these measures themselves may become part of the problem. It is difficult to

determine what constitutes an 'adequate defence' for a nation, particularly a small one. Nations would want to achieve some margin of advantage over potential adversaries. But even if it is possible, this approach might only encourage an arms race, as the potential adversary then seeks to defend itself adequately. Ironically therefore, defensive buildups to forestall conflict may in fact encourage it.

#### REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

It was not the purpose of this section to deal extensively with the theories of war. What was intended was to review, using historical examples, some of the established explanations as to why nations may engage in conflict.

It has already been indicated that circumstances in the South Pacific differ from many of the examples quoted. None-the-less, it is possible to identify comparable factors at work in the Region which could result in conflict, and from these, to postulate some more specific and realistic scenarios.

While the Region is collectively weak in economic terms, there is still a disparity in natural resources among the South Pacific states. This may cause friction, but the current absence of substantial indigenous armed forces in the Region suggests

that conflict between the states on this issue is only likely if an extra-territorial power supports one of the belligerents.

However, the economic weaknesses do contribute to potentially more serious developments. These include the acceptance by economically vulnerable states of aid and assistance from extra-regional powers. The assistance provided may then afford opportunities for those powers to separately pursue economic objectives in the Region, or to cause internal conflict within a state by destabilizing the government. This is clearly one reason why a Soviet presence in the South Pacific is unwelcome, leading as it could to the eventual establishment of a client state within the Region.

In the longer term, discovery of off-shore resources may invite either aggression from an extra-territorial power wishing to monopolize the resource for its own use, or conflict between two external powers seeking to gain greatest influence within the resource owning state.

The desire of the Kanaks in New Caledonia to obtain their independence, and in due course a similar conviction on behalf of the French Polynesians, have already been highlighted as the cause of possibly civil war within the French territories. The Kanaks would describe this as a 'war of liberation', and the French would defend their interests on the basis of sovereign rights.

Opposition to French nuclear testing has previously caused physical clashes. The SPNFZT now provides a moral (and some might argue legal) basis for active challenge to the program. An escalation in anti-French agitation is therefore highly likely in this area as well.

Vanuatu's 'non-alignment' would not be of concern were it not for the way in which that country has provided an opening in the Region for groups opposed to Western democratic institutions. This opportunity to pursue ideological confrontation could result in limited inter-state as well as intra-state conflict, particularly if insurgency movements are established in states with fragile political structures. Some states also lend themselves to partisan intervention in underlying ethnic disputes: for example, between the Indians and Fijians in Fiji, or elsewhere between Melanesians and Asians.

Central to any political conflict in the Region would be the contest for influence by the US and the Soviet Union. While it has previously been suggested that the two superpowers would avoid direct conflict, there is every prospect that they would take sides in any substantial regional confrontation. The issue of sovereignty is likely to be a catalyst for conflicts of a political nature - specifically those involving boundary disputes in off-shore resource areas, where 200 mile economic zones may overlap.

### Possible Scenarios for Conflict

These scenarios are based on projections from current developments. They depend on a variety of assumptions, most of which are open to challenge. But they are outlined here simply to demonstrate what may occur in the Region and which areas we should devote our attention to. They are not necessarily in any order of probability, but they add specificity to the above discussion on possible causes of conflict.

Civil War in New Caledonia. This is a realistic prospect. It would be exacerbated by rising tensions between France and the SPF countries as the latter attempt to force the issue through the UN and in so doing, heighten the aspirations and expectations of the Kanaks. It would also be encouraged by Vanuatu and Libya providing sufficient support for the Kanak elements to wage a determined struggle against local French forces.

Confrontation with France in French Polynesia. The Greenpeace Movement will continue to contest French naval patrols in the Mururoa test area. It is possible that a more concerted effort could be made should any of New Zealand, Vanuatu, or extra-territorial interests support a campaign which provokes a French military response. The probability of this scenario would increase if France were to suffer some set-back in New Caledonia.

Insurgency. Over time, a variety of Soviet backed extra-territorial interests could instigate the downfall of a government through insurgency or even by orchestrating a coup d'etat. The events leading to the Grenada rescue mission come readily to mind as an example of such an event. Alternatively, the insurgency may become less dramatic and of longer duration. It could possibly exploit ethnic tensions in those states with mixed populations, or capitalize on the economic difficulties currently faced by most nations. The acquisition of a foothold in the Region by the Soviet Union would clearly increase the possibility of such an occurrence. And Vanuatu's anti-Western attitudes incline it to support if not sponsor such developments in the Region.

Terrorism. Vanuatu already provides a suitable base from which to export terrorism. Such acts, probably Libyan supported, would be directed at undermining the confidence which island states currently have in the Western nations of the Pacific Rim.

Direct Assault by a Predatory Extra-Territorial Power. While highly unlikely, an extra-territorial power may establish some justification for acting against an island state to secure control for economic, ideological, political, or military purposes. Legitimacy for such an action could be achieved by contriving an 'invitation' to intervene.

Superpower Confrontation and Harassment. The greater the buildup in superpower naval activity, the greater will become the prospect that units will confront and harass one another. Open ocean areas are ideal for shows of naval strength and the South Pacific lends itself admirably to such provocation. However, as indicated elsewhere, both the US and the Soviet Union are only likely to engage in open direct conflict through miscalculation, not through any deliberate policy.

#### Summary

The South Pacific is a region where few of the historical causes of conflict are directly applicable. There are no common borders; resources are not yet a cause for inter-state dispute; and the capability does not currently exist for nations in the Region to wage war against each other.

But the economies and political structures are fragile. Scope exists for interference, and for exploitation by extra-territorial powers, specifically the Soviet Union and Libya, intent on fomenting unrest. Internal disputes, and existing intra-state or inter-state friction will be exacerbated by the introduction into the Region of such elements opposed as they are to the fundamental principles of Western style democracy and free-market economies. The current political attitude of Vanuatu is an encouragement to these elements, and could lead that country to become a useful land base in the Region for the Soviet Union.

The most likely conflict in the near future is considered to be a confrontation with France, either by the Kanaks in New Caledonia, or by anti-nuclear groups in French Polynesia.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Bernard Brodie, War and Politics, p.3.
2. Ibid.
3. It is suggested here that Argentina grossly underestimated the commitment of Great Britain to defending the Falklands. While this is perhaps more a case of miscalculation than irrational behaviour, it does illustrate how the initiator of a conflict can indeed be the loser.
4. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, as quoted in Brodie, Ibid, p.278.
5. There were two economic reasons for Japan's actions leading to Pearl Harbor. The 'Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere' was its way of securing supplies of raw materials from nations in the Western Pacific. It had embarked on a plan of expansion and conquest in the early part of this century, but its need was more urgent during the depression in 1929-31. However, its decision to directly challenge the United States was based on then President Roosevelt's demand that Japan withdraw from Indo-China, his freezing of Japanese assets in the US, and his placing embargoes on oil supply.
6. Brodie, p.305.

PART 6  
CONFLICT AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

CURRENT POLICY OBJECTIVES

US National interests are described in these terms: 'peace, freedom, and prosperity for ourselves and for our allies and our friends, and for others around the world. We seek an international order that encourages self-determination, democratic institutions, economic development, and human rights.'<sup>1</sup> The Secretary of Defense's Report goes on to state that 'we maintain our steadfast concern for the security and well being of our allies and other nations friendly to our interests.'<sup>2</sup>

From these interests are derived national security objectives. As they relate to the South Pacific, the main emphases of these objectives are:

- deterrence of aggression and, should that fail, its defeat;
- encouragement and assistance to allies in self-defence; and

- a reduction in Soviet presence throughout the world.

Although the US has withdrawn its security obligations to New Zealand, its 'commitment to security in the South Pacific remains as strong as ever...Bilateral cooperation with Australia, under ANZUS, will continue, however, as the cornerstone of our security efforts in the South Pacific.'<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting Australia's closer political and economic association with the Region, Australia's formal position on the South Pacific places greater emphasis on these aspects of foreign policy.

In an address in Fiji in May 1986, the Australian Foreign Minister stated 'We accept our South Pacific neighbours as close friends with whom we have a clear sense of community... we share with our South Pacific neighbours strategic, political, and economic interests of great significance...' <sup>4</sup> Mr Hayden went on to detail:

- the Australian Government's increasing interest in the SPF;
- economic and technical aid, including improved prospects for imports into Australia from the Region; and

- the Defence Cooperation Program, which supports the development of indigenous defence capabilities.

We might therefore summarize Western policy objectives in the Region as follows:

- The maintenance of a benign strategic environment in which the island states can develop politically and economically without interference from others with ideologies foreign to the Region.
- The promotion of a sense of strategic community in which sovereign rights of states are recognized and there is a common response to any external aggression or incursion.

#### REGIONAL SECURITY

Previous sections of this study have discussed issues affecting the regional security objectives outlined above, and how these issues might lead to regional conflict. In Part 5, some specific scenarios were postulated. It was concluded that the main challenges to regional security were:

- Soviet penetration into the Region, initially exploiting commercial and diplomatic access

but ultimately with long term military objectives in mind as it seeks to challenge US regional dominance.

- Confrontation between France and the SPF countries over the related issues of New Caledonian independence and French nuclear testing.
- Libyan association with, and assistance to regional elements, notably Vanuatu and the Kanak independence movement.

Western nations must address these challenges. This requires identification of some more specific regional policy objectives, and recognition of the possible need for changes to current strategies for the Region.

#### POLICY OBJECTIVES

Two objectives have been developed. They address the more significant issues of containing Soviet influence and seeking some reconciliation of French interests. If we can achieve these objectives, we might restore some measure of peace and stability to the Region, and avoid conflict.

### Containment of Soviet Influence

The counter to Soviet activity remains Western hegemony, and a realization by regional states of the potential dangers of Soviet encroachment.

It has been realized that Soviet successes were due largely to Western neglect. However, this was not before the Soviets had obtained port access in Vanuatu. Even so, it would be difficult to deny the island states diplomatic contact with the Soviet Union. But we should work towards ensuring that further such opportunities do not present themselves.

A renewed interest in the Region by particularly the US and Australia is a good signal to the island states. And the recently drafted fishing treaty could help overcome the legacy of animosity left by the US tuna fleet's earlier disregard of national sovereignty.<sup>5</sup>

There are several other opportunities for economic cooperation, including the acceptance of island exports with reduced tariff provisions, cooperative ventures encouraging investment capital from the US and Australia, and assistance with resource exploration. And it was noteworthy that Western nations responded rapidly to the need for emergency assistance following the recent cyclones. Of course some cash aid will still be required, in amounts and for purposes agreed jointly between

donor and recipient. But in all of these dealings, as indeed also with our political associations, we must recognize that the island states have unique cultures and outlooks which vary from our own. We must respect these, and be sensitive to them. We must be seen to place the interests of the islands first, rather than our own countries - a demand which does not sit easily with our normal approach to foreign policy. For above all, we must remove any suggestion that we are exploitative, or that the arrangements we make are only to our advantage rather than the islands. Perceptions here are as important as deeds. The relationships must be mature, not patronizing. Particular effort needs to be applied in encouraging Vanuatu to reduce its ideological hostility to the West, and to cast off what Rubenstein refers to as 'an incipient form of Melanesian Socialism'.<sup>6</sup>

Supporting this sensitive application of diplomacy and economic cooperation must be a guarantee of regional security. This does not mean the stationing of large forces but an unobtrusive regional presence which provides reassurance to the island states, without being threatening to them. To allay their concern at any build up of military strength and specifically by a superpower, this military activity should primarily involve Australia and New Zealand. And it should be practical rather than ceremonial. Surveillance of off-shore resource zones and the enhancement of indigenous defence forces for example, are useful ways in which security assistance can be provided. Further, it would not be unreasonable for Australia and New Zealand jointly

to establish some military capability to deploy to the Region at short notice to meet low level threats to national sovereignty. New Zealand, in fact, already has examined this requirement.

US Defense Forces of course still have a role. US Pacific Command (PACOM), based in Hawaii, has responsibility for this Region. The substantial assets deployed to PACOM are intended to ensure US dominance in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and they already work to contain and monitor Soviet operations from Asia. But their immediate value to the South Pacific is the deterrent effect of their presence close by. While this is not to suggest that periodic patrols through the Region, for surveillance and monitoring of Soviet activity, would not be appropriate, any substantial military buildup within the Region could be counter-productive. It may well encourage a Soviet response.<sup>7</sup>

The withdrawal of US security guarantees to New Zealand under ANZUS is understandable but regrettable. It would serve the security interests of this Region better if some reconciliation on this issue could be achieved. The US is hopeful that this might occur soon, but the New Zealand Government has to acknowledge that the initiative in this issue is now theirs. In the meantime, the strength of the US-Australian relationship must be relied upon as a factor for regional security.

Finally, the US, Australia, and New Zealand are not the only participants in this containment policy. Use should of

course be made of Chinese and Japanese economic and political activity in the Region, which would generally be consistent with Western interests, and certainly preferred over Soviet activity.

#### Reconciliation of French Objectives

If we add to the weight of US, Australian, New Zealand, Chinese, and Japanese activity that of the French, we can achieve a high degree of Western hegemony and regional security. The problem of course is that there is a significant distance between France and the US on one hand, and the South Pacific Forum on the other. Some reconciliation is required.

The French are not going to be easily persuaded to change their position, either on the issue of nuclear testing or New Caledonian independence. Their history tells us that France has suffered over time some humiliating defeats; and it will in future hold its ground. This after all is the basis of their independent nuclear policy. If it has the tacit agreement of the US, as it does on at least the nuclear issue, then it will not be troubled by the objections of the SPF.

It is highly unlikely that the SPF would readily abandon either its concern for a political solution in New Caledonia, or its revulsion at the use of the South Pacific for nuclear testing. Indeed, Australia's attempt to modify the SPNFZT to allay US concerns was treated with suspicion by several South

Pacific states which wanted the Treaty strengthened to exclude even nuclear ship passage.

In the real world, conciliation is only achievable through compromise. The parties to this dispute must realize that it is their intransigence which has encouraged opportunistic elements from Libya, and eventually the Soviet Union, to enter the Region and destabilize it.

It has previously been argued that France is legally correct on both issues. The onus is therefore on Australia, as a principal sponsor of the SPNFZT and the UN approach on decolonization of New Caledonia, to modify its stand and to close the gulf which separates the parties. This is not an easy task -particularly as the Treaty has already been ratified, the UN has already taken the New Caledonia issue onto its agenda, and Australia has received international praise for its contribution (albeit largely from countries without interest in or understanding of the Region).

This study does not have a solution to this dilemma. But it does suggest that in the first instance:

- the US, France, Australia, and possibly New Zealand, be invited to examine the issues, clarify their positions, identify any common ground, and consider where compromise is possible to resolve outstanding disagreements;

and  
- that the SPF then be invited to consider where it may have to reach a compromise agreement.

This suggestion presupposes that Australia is an acceptable representative of the SPF, and that the governments concerned are willing to suffer some loss of face both domestically and internationally in their quest for a solution.

The diplomatic task for Australia is then to heighten the awareness of the island states to the dangers which continued friction with France bring to the Region. These dangers are greater than either the nuclear testing program or continued colonial authority in New Caledonia. Idealism is abundant in the South Pacific, and still has a good deal of attraction in Australia and New Zealand - the success of the 'peace' movements illustrates that. We would not wish to destroy idealism but rather to complement it with the realities of the world -specifically, that the South Pacific cannot remain forever isolated from the global superpower struggle, but we can limit its intrusion into the Region by reconciling and consolidating Western interests.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Caspar W. Weinberger, Report of the Secretary of Defense to the Congress on the FY 1988/FY 1989 Budget, 12 January 1987, p.41.
2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. p.266.

4. Bill Hayden, "Australia - South Pacific Relations", Speech to the University of the South Pacific, 21 May 1986, recorded in Australian Foreign Affairs Record, May 1986.

5. As reported by Barbara Crossette in The New York Times, 7 January 1987, a draft fisheries treaty between the US and the Forum Fisheries Agency, representing 16 Pacific nations, included both development aid and the payment of fees by American tuna fleets - worth over \$US 63 million every two years.

6. Colin L. Rubenstein. "Trouble makers in the turbulent South Pacific", Pacific Defence Reporter, October 1986. p.9.

7. It could be argued that one of the reasons behind the substantial build up of Soviet military capability in the Far East is the dominance of the US in the Pacific. The Soviets see US forces in Korea, Japan, and the North Pacific Ocean as threatening. They believe it necessary to counter this in the interests of their self defence and that of their allies in North Korea and Vietnam.

PART 7  
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The South Pacific Region is strategically important, particularly to Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. It lies astride the routes between these countries, and offers an alternative access to the Indian Ocean should it not be possible to move through the Indonesian archipelago.

Tensions in the Region have increased in recent years due largely to:

- Soviet encroachment, specifically their fishing agreements with Kiribati and Vanuatu.
- The desire of the Kanaks in New Caledonia to achieve independence from France.
- Continued nuclear testing in French Polynesia against the wishes of the South Pacific Forum.
- Libyan intrusions, both into Vanuatu and more recently, their association with Kanak elements in New Caledonia.

These tensions could develop into conflict. The possibility of civil war in New Caledonia is high. Confrontation between the

SPF nations and France could occur at Mururoa. And it is clearly possible for extra-territorial powers to foment unrest in the Region, either to exploit yet to be discovered natural resources, or to destabilize governments and replace them with agents of their own ideologies. A Soviet ground presence in the Region would enhance these possibilities.

It remains a fundamental security interest of the US, Australia, and New Zealand to maintain regional stability, to encourage economic and political development of the newly independent island states, and to avoid the potential for conflict.

The renewed interest in the Region by Western countries is appropriate and timely. But in developing policy options, each of these nations must take into account the need to respect cultural and political differences and traditions, and national sovereignty. Australia and New Zealand are well placed to take a lead in the support and assistance programs for the Region. These countries have close political and cultural ties with the island states, and are seen as less threatening than others. But there is also a role for the US in:

- expanding economic contacts with island states on terms designed to support the interests of the islanders;
- continuing to underwrite the security of the Region

through its forces assigned to PACOM, but being careful to avoid a physical force buildup in the South Pacific which may be seen as threatening and which could invite a Soviet response;

- seeking some reconciliation with New Zealand on ANZUS to restore confidence to those island states with close affiliations with New Zealand; and
- supporting a dialogue between the South Pacific nations and France aimed at reaching some compromise over its nuclear testing program and New Caledonian independence.

Australia is playing an active and constructive role in the Region, in economic, political, and defence terms. But it must consider some radical changes to its South Pacific policies. It should initiate dialogue with France, on behalf of the SPF countries, to obtain some recognition by that country of the concerns of the island states, and to seek compromises on both nuclear testing and New Caledonian independence. However, recognizing France's rights and potential response, Australia must work with the Forum countries in appreciating the dangers to the Region which will inevitably be the result of any further confrontation with France. There needs to be a conscious collective effort to recognize the realities of further Soviet and Libyan involvement and to see them as a greater threat to the Region than France.

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